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ABSTRACT

Recent studies have demonstrated that the time spent gazing at one's own image as it is reflected in a mirror is positively influenced by the level of physical attractiveness. When in a state of objective self-awareness, self-awareness theory proposes that an aversive state will arise due to an awareness of negative discrepancies between the perceived and the ideal self. In this study male (N=101) and female (N=100) pedestrians were observed as they passed a sequence of mirrored windows to assess the relationship between physical attractiveness and mirror-gazing behavior. Subjects in the field study were rated low, medium, or high on their levels of attractiveness and dress by two observers who unobtrusively reached a consensus on the ratings before subjects reached the mirrored window. Relationships between levels of attractiveness and self-observation proportions indicated that those who were high in their level of attractiveness spent a longer proportion of time in front of the window viewing their image than those who were moderate or low in their level of attractiveness. A significant relationship was not found between the subjects' level of dress and the length of time spent viewing their image. (ABL)

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Physical Attractiveness and Mirror Self-Observation Behavior

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Abstract

One hundred and one male and one hundred female pedestrians were observed as they passed a sequence of mirrored windows to assess the relationship between physical attractiveness and mirror- gazing behavior. Subjects in the field study were rated low, medium, or high on their levels of attractiveness and dress by two observers who unobtrusively reached a consensus on the ratings before subjects reached the mirrored window. Relationships between levels of attractiveness and self-observation proportions indicated that those who were high in their level of attractiveness spent a longer proportion of time in front of the window viewing their image than those who were moderate or low in their level of attractiveness. A significant relationship was not found between the subjects' level of dress and the length of time spent viewing their image.

Physical Attractiveness and Mirror Self-Observation Behavior

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Recent studies have demonstrated that the time spent gazing at one's own image as it is reflected in a mirror is positively influenced by the level of physical attractiveness (McDonald & Eilenfield, 1980; Lipson, Przybyla & Byrne, 1983). In their studies, the investigators recorded the level of attractiveness of college students who were caucasians as they passed a mirrored window on a university campus. Their findings indicated that more attractive individuals tended to view their image longer than the less attractive individuals (McDonald & Eilenfield, 1980; Lipson, Przybyla & Byrne, 1983).

According to self-awareness theory (Duval & Wicklund, 1972) the focus of attention is of a bidirectional nature. Attention is either directed toward external variables, or when it is directed toward the self as an object one is in a state of "objective self-awareness." Any stimulus which reminds a person of themselves (eg. their reflection in a mirror) will create a state of self awareness.

When in a state of objective self-awareness, the theory proposes that an aversive state will arise due to an awareness of negative discrepancies between the perceived and the ideal self (Duval & Wicklund, 1972). Findings by Gibbons and Wicklund (1976) suggest that both negative and positive discrepancies occur. A negative discrepancy results during the process of

self-evaluation if the perceived self is discovered as being inferior to the ideal self (eg. one's image in the mirror is less attractive than anticipated). Conversely, a positive discrepancy occurs if the self is perceived as being greater than the individual's correct standard (eg. the image in the mirror is perceived as being more attractive than anticipated) (Steenbarger & Aderman, 1979). In response to the positive or negative discrepancies which reach awareness during the self-evaluation process, the individual will engage in an approach or an avoidance response. Those who find a positive discrepancy will engage in an approach response (engage in further mirror gazing behavior) while those who experience a negative discrepancy will avoid self-awareness (avoid mirror-gazing behavior).

There is some evidence to suggest that the subjects' level of dress affects observer ratings of attractiveness. Buckley (1983) found that observer judgements of physical attractiveness varied as the apparel worn in stimulus photographs was manipulated. Brown, Cash, and Noles (1983) found a positive relationship between observer ratings of grooming (including clothing) and overall ratings of physical attractiveness. This issue will be addressed in this study as well as the related issue of whether the level of dress affects the self observation behavior of the study participants.

The purpose of the present study was to evaluate the relationship between physical attractiveness and mirror self-observation behavior while assessing the influence of subject dress on observer ratings and subject self-observation behavior. The study was conducted in a more representative environment than the prior studies of the approach/avoidance of self-awareness and includes

subjects of an extended age range (McDonald & Eilenfield, 1980; Lipson, Przybyla & Byrne, 1983).

Method

Subjects

Subjects included in the field study were individuals who passed a series of consecutive plate glass windows which extended 10 feet high and 72 feet long. One hundred and one males and one hundred female caucasian pedestrians were observed, who ranged in age from approximately 8 years old to the late seventies. Observations were conducted from a parked car across the street at a distance of approximately 60 feet from the mirrored window. When two or more persons reached the window at the same time, the person who walked nearest to the window was recorded. Recordings of observations were not conducted when buses or large trucks obstructed the view for a portion of the walk across the mirrored area. It is possible that observations of some subjects may have been included a second time if they passed through the mirrored area on more than one occasion while observations were being conducted.

Procedure

Subjects were rated low, medium, or high on their level of attractiveness and their level of dress by two raters who reached a consensus on the ratings before the subjects reached the mirrored window. The duration in which subjects observed their reflection in the window along with the duration of the entire walk along the windowed area were recorded in 100ths of seconds. In

order to be considered a self-observation the subjects had to turn their head in a 90 degree arc toward the window. If more than one self-observation was made during the walk, the duration of all self observations were summed.

Results

Attractiveness and sex were included as factors in a two-way analysis of variance, revealing the predicted main effect of attractiveness [$F(1,200)=4.671$, ($p<.02$)]. No interaction effects reached statistical significance.

A one-way analysis of variance also revealed the predicted effects of attractiveness versus the proportion of time spent viewing the image of the self [$F(2,198)=5.07$, ($p<.01$)]. The proportion of time spent in self-observation was calculated by dividing the time (in seconds) spent viewing the image of the self by the total duration of the time spent passing the window (in seconds). The results indicate that persons who were rated as being high in their level of attractiveness had a much greater proportion of self-observation time ($M=18.9$) than those who were rated as being moderate or low in their level of attractiveness ($M=9.5$ and $M=9.0$) respectively.

A one-way analysis of variance was also calculated using the dress-rate and the self-observation proportion as factors. The results did not reach statistical significance [$F(2,198) =.71$, ($p>.05$)] indicating that the way in which subjects were dressed did not influence the amount of time in which they viewed their reflection. A Spearman Correlation Coefficient was calculated between the attractiveness and the dress ratings ($r=.25$, $p<.001$) indicating

little association between the attractiveness ratings assigned by the observers and the dress of the subjects.

Using the sex of the subject and the self-observation proportion as factors, a one-way analysis of variance was calculated. Again, the results did not reach statistical significance [$F(1,199)=1.70$, ($p<.05$)] indicating that there were no sex differences in the amount of time spent viewing the image of the self.

Discussion

The results of this study support previous findings of a linear relationship between levels of physical attractiveness and mirror self-observation behavior. For both sexes, those who were high in their level of physical attractiveness viewed themselves considerably longer than those who were moderate or low in their level of physical attractiveness. Thus, the results of prior studies of this relationship have been replicated with an extended age range and a sample which is more representative of the normal population (McDonald & Eilenfield, 1980; Lipson, Przybyla, & Byrne, 1983).

Buckley (1983) suggests that the use of judges in physical attractiveness research may not be valid when dress is an extraneous variable in attractiveness ratings. However, in our study the small correlation between the observer ratings of physical attractiveness and the subjects' level of dress suggests that judges are able to assign ratings of physical attractiveness without being strongly influenced by the dress level of subjects. The lack of significant differences in mirror self-observation behavior with variations in the level of dress suggests that the

level of dress may not influence how long one spends viewing their image as it is reflected on the surface of a mirror.

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